

Planning ahead is key to keeping yourself calm and collected during the Thanksgiving hustle and bustle, and to making sure food safety takes precedence. For example, consider these tips from Countdown to Thanksgiving on [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov):

- A few weeks before Thanksgiving, start clearing the refrigerator to make sure you have plenty of room to thaw the turkey. A 16- to 20-pound turkey takes four to five days to thaw in the refrigerator, and it takes up a lot of space. So, don't wait until you bring the turkey home from the grocery store. Eat up those leftovers. Put that bottled water back in the pantry to have space later.
- Make sure you have a meat thermometer that's easy to use and that you trust. Turkey needs to be cooked to 165 degrees F throughout. You need to test it at the innermost part of the thigh, the innermost part of the wing, and the thickest part of the breast. You can't do that with the pop-up thermometer that comes with the turkey.

Taking these issues seriously is important, especially for people with health problems such as diabetes and cancer, which weaken the immune system. That decreases their body's ability to fight off foodborne illness. Other at-risk populations are people 65 and older, even those who are otherwise healthy, pregnant women, and children under age 5. What might cause a mild gastrointestinal illness for someone else could send these people to the hospital. Why? Again, from [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov):

- As people age, the gastrointestinal tract holds onto food longer and the stomach produces less acid, allowing bacteria more of a chance to grow and cause havoc. And, the liver and kidneys can have more trouble ridding the body of foreign bacteria and toxins as we age.
- Young children's stomachs also produce less acid, and their immune systems are still developing. That's why children under 5 have the highest incidence of many types of foodborne illness, and are more at risk for serious complications. In addition, small bodies are more susceptible to dehydration from the diarrhea that often accompanies foodborne illness.

Given the potential for such consequences, planning ahead and taking food safety precautions makes sense. For more holiday guidance, see [foodsafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov) and search for "Thanksgiving." <https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/events/thanksgiving/index.html>

Chow Line is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 364 W. Lane Ave., Suite B120, Columbus, OH 43201, or filipic.3@osu.edu.

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